2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

I suspect that geologists would find this explanation unacceptable: but in Lingtem there are no geologists; and as for me, I prefer the Lepcha story. It is a good example of their way of thinking and will serve as an introduction to what is to follow.

We reached Lingtem in an hour from the pass and found the headman waiting for us with a gift of eggs and milk. He told us we might live in the monastery itself; but this had the disadvantage that one might not smoke inside the building. Eventually, however, the Mandal said it would be all right providing there was no smoking in the actual rooms where the images are kept; so we decided to move in straight away.

For want of a better word in the English language the Lamaist *gompa* is generally described as a monastery, though such places can in no way be compared with the religious institutions known by that name in Europe. The inmates of *gompas* are sometimes celibates (but seldom so in Sikkim) and most monasteries own property: but apart from this there is, as Mme David-Neel, the eminent Tibetan scholar and traveller, has pointed out, hardly anything in common between the Christian and the Lamaist religious orders.

The Lingtem monastery is about sixty feet square and has two storeys. In appearance it is almost identical with the ordinary Lepcha house, except for its greater size, and the broad band of red ochre round its walls, which denotes that it is a sacred building. The lower floor contains the main hall, which is used regularly for services. Here there is a big altar containing many gilded images, with a specially fine one of Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava, who first introduced Buddhism into Tibet) in the centre. In front of the images there are always seven small bowls of water, in order that the gods may wash and drink. These are emptied at dusk and refilled again at dawn. When the water is taken away it is replaced by one or more tiny wicks, floating in either butter or oil, which give a faint glimmer like a night-light. On special occasions there will be dozens of these

lights; grain and flowers are also offered to the gods from time to time.

779 On either side of the altar are pigeon-holes, in which the [778] 222 volumes of the Teng-gyur (the great Commentary on the 346 Lamaist Scriptures) are stored, the actual scripture itself, the [212] Kang-gyur as it is called (108 volumes), being stored in the upstairs room which we used as a bedroom. There are no 352 chairs in the monastery, the Lamas* (here called Yukman) [516] sitting cross-legged on planks on the floor, which are arranged 792 in two lines running at right angles to the altar. The head Lama, or Dorje Lopön, has a rough sort of seat on which he, too, sits cross-legged. This, however, is raised a little above the level of the floor.

346 The main hall takes up most of the ground floor, but at one 788 end there is a room, only about nine feet wide, which in 778 addition to a small altar, complete with image, houses three enormous prayer-drums, which ring a bell each time they are turned completely round. These drums, or perhaps barrels would be a better word, are about ten feet high, and each is completely filled with strips of paper on which the magic formula *Om mane padme hum* has been written over and over again. One turn of the drum is equivalent to uttering this mystic sentence the same number of times that it has been written on the paper within. When one has nothing better to do, therefore, a quiet half-hour of turning a giant prayer-wheel is as good a means of acquiring merit as any other. People would often drop in at odd moments to do this.

778 The largest of the three drums had a rather elaborate top that projected through the ceiling into a small room above, which we used as a bathroom. This top was decorated with a muslin flounce of red, blue, and yellow and looked something like a rather dirty ballet skirt. When the drum was turned

*The term Lama should rightly only be applied to a monk who has reached a certain definite standing in the Buddhist church by reason of his learning and piety. It is extremely doubtful if anyone in Lingtem has any claim to this title; but since the term is commonly, though quite incorrectly, used by most Western writers to denote any Lamaist monk, and since the Lepchas themselves use it in this way, I have decided to follow the general practice.

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Inebus performing their ceremony of circumambulating the monastery.

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Hlatam, the alleged poisoner.

Domestic altar in the private house of a Lama. Note the reserve store of maize hanging from the rafters on the left; and on the right a hurricane lantern, one of the treasures of the house.

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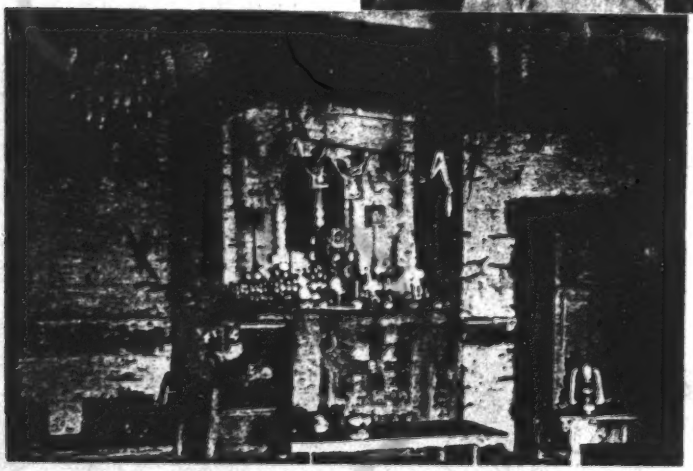

[facing p. 77]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

793 ox had been already slaughtered. A number of people were
755 drinking in the kitchen and in the altar-room next door Tafoor and another Lama were chanting, accompanying themselves with cymbals and drums. The altar was filled with *tormas* of every size and description, some of them embellished with stylised floral designs in coloured butter.* In front of the group of *tormas* was a row of lamps, about a
● [373] dozen in number. These had already been lighted and formed the sole illumination of the room. On the ground in front of the Lamas was an object known as *Nak-po-Gosum*, "the
778 black (magical) three-headed one." This was a very elaborate figure of a three-headed hermaphrodite adorned with what looked like bits of stick, brambles and feathers. At the time there was no opportunity to examine it carefully in the semi-darkened room, but since it appeared to be of unusual interest I later got Tafoor to come and make one for me, and its details are given below. The figure itself was about one foot high, but its genitalia, which were prominently displayed, were life-sized. The male organ was shown protruding from the female, with the pudenda hanging below. Some of the blood of the slaughtered ox had been sprinkled over the figure, parts of which had been previously coloured.

755 While the Lamas continued their chanting the patient
793 remained in the kitchen, where the Mun Gongyop was doing some ceremony, with the head and legs of the ox laid out in front of him. It seemed to consist in the constant repetition of the names of various gods and demons. As soon as this was

* The *torma*, or "holy food," which is used in every Lamaist ceremony, is "a high, conical cake of dough, butter and sugar, variously coloured." In Lingtem they were usually made of plain millet paste. Mrs. de Beauvoir Stocks states that the Lepchas "exhibit *tormas* as phallic offerings." I have never come across this suggestion before and believe it to be quite unfounded. I was told in Tibet that the *torma* was originally made in the form of an image of the god to which it was intended as an offering. As ritual became more complicated so the numbers of *tormas* required increased in number (some ceremonies require several hundred), and in this way, perhaps as some form of labour-saving device, the original figure became
[531] stylised into its present conical form. But in any case the Lepcha has no use for symbolism. When he wishes to suggest the human genitalia he represents it as it is: it would never occur to him to do otherwise.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

down the valley, and Gongyop came and squatted in front of it, prior to placing the remaining objects in position. Of these the most important were eight eggs, which had been previously inspected by the Mandal to see that they were fresh. Should bad eggs be offered it would mean that some one would fall ill. A heap of parched rice was now placed in the centre of the basket, this having been contributed by the whole village, each householder bringing a small quantity done up in banana leaves. Eight stones were now picked up from the path and placed in position. Scraps of fish, miscellaneous birds' flesh, sticks of ginger, and rice followed. There were also eight slender branches of wormwood, with all but the leaves at the top removed. Gongyop now constructed eight small cups from the folded leaves of banana. He placed these round the front edge of the basket and then attached strings of red, white and blue cotton to the eight sprigs of wormwood. Having done this the *Rum* was sprinkled with holy water: the offering was now ready.

Gongyop now began to chant very quietly and quickly, at the same time taking up one of the eggs and pressing it hard against his forehead. He continued thus for about a minute, after which he got up and replaced the egg on the *Rum*. He did this several times; and then took another series of red, white, and blue strings, which he draped across the basket. He now filled one of the small cups with water and green tea-leaves, locally grown. When only three eggs remained he put some grain in a small leaf cup, scattered some of it over the offering and replaced the remaining eggs. After this a helper came and filled the lamps with butter. Three hollowed-out banana stems, each about six inches long, were now brought, on each of which was a small heap of smouldering ash. These three heaps are known, respectively, as *Songsur*, *Kasur*, and *Chasur*. On *Songsur* was put a little juniper, together with some ghee; on *Kasur*, grain and ghee; and on *Chasur*, green tea-leaves and ghee. Now the lamps were lighted; and since there was a slight wind blowing a protector of banana leaf was placed over each one to prevent it being extinguished.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

in Lingtem, is being married to-day. His first wife died a year ago, and he is now marrying a childless widow of twenty-four. It seems that in the eyes of the village he has struck lucky; for in normal circumstances it is not considered auspicious for a girl to marry a widower. In this particular case, however, the girl's deceased husband had no brothers; nor was anyone else entitled to inherit her, so the present arrangement suits both parties. The only fly in to-day's ointment is that the birth-signs of the bride and bridegroom are antagonistic; so much so, in fact, that many people think the marriage foredoomed to failure. Ongden, however, is quite well-off, and in any case, being himself a Lama, can probably obtain special terms from the faculty for the services which will restore the balance of ill-luck. But in view of the special circumstances both he and his bride think the risk worth taking.

We were summoned to the house at nine-thirty, but nothing much was happening when we arrived. We went first to the kitchen, where some thirty or forty people were sitting quietly soaking, after which we were shown into the altar-room, where the actual ceremony will take place. Six Lamas were sitting against the wall: they too were drinking. The second Dorje-Lopön appeared to be in charge, and the others all had instruments, the usual six-foot trumpets, clarionets and drums.

On the altar were a number of *tormas* of rice, decorated with dabs of coloured butter. Into these were stuck several rather crudely coloured pictures of gods, the centre one of which was said to represent Guru Rimpoche. Behind these one of the usual Tibetan pictures had been hung; but it was so old and tattered as to make its details unrecognisable. There was also a small brass vessel filled with holy water, into the neck of which a peacock's feather had been stuck; also a beer bottle, said to contain spirits. I also noticed a number of small bowls filled with rice and other grains, and several oranges and a heap of walnuts. In front of all was a row of small lamps, the last of which was only lighted when the bride arrived.